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substantially dewatering the hot slurry and shaping the dewatered slurry to form a composite product before rehydrating the hemihydrate back to gypsum;

said improvement comprising monitoring the aspect ratio of said
5 acicular calcium sulfate alpha hemihydrate crystals and adjusting the amount of alum used to form said slurry, the amount of alum being sufficient to maintain the aspect ratio of said crystals to at least about 5:1 and no greater than about 50:1.

14. The improved process of claim 13, wherein the amount of
10 alum adjusted to maintain the aspect ratio of said crystals to at least about 10:1 and no greater than about 50:1.